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SUBJECT: OMANI MINISTRY URGES U.S. PHARMA COMPANIES TO
APPLY FOR PATENTS

¶1. On June 30, Econoff met with Dr. Batool Jaffer Suleiman, Director of Rational Drug Use, Ministry of Health, to discuss the government's recent purchase of Indian generic product Bortenat, produced by Natco Pharmaceuticals, instead of U.S.-patented Velcade, produced by Johnson and Johnson. Suleiman prefaced the conversation by noting that U.S. pharmaceutical companies are required to apply for patent protection of their products in Oman either with Oman's patent office located in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry or the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) Patent Office based in Riyadh. (Note: Oman's patent office is not capable of processing patent applications at this point. It will only date stamp applications for delivery to the GCC's patent office. End Note.) Since the GCC office only opened in 1998, Suleiman reaffirmed her commitment to register those U.S. products in the Omani market which were patented in the U.S. prior to that time. For those U.S. products patented in the U.S. after 1998, she requested that the company produce proof of applying for the patent in order to register them in Oman.

¶2. On the specific case of Velcade, Econoff pointed out that the product's patent number was issued before the opening of the GCC patent office, to which Suleiman agreed. Suleiman explained that she followed-up with the hospital responsible for purchasing the generic product, which reported that the purchase was made on behalf of one patient who was on the medication in India before being transferred to Muscat. No other purchases were made.

¶3. On a separate note, Suleiman reiterated Oman's interest in partnering with a multinational producer to manufacture patented pharmaceuticals in Oman. She explained that while there are only two companies in Oman which currently produce generic products, the regional demand was there to produce name-brand products locally.

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